LCPS Parent Group

**Handbook**



**Preface**

Schools and school divisions are better when parents are active, empowered partners in children’s learning. Loudoun County Public Schools (LCPS) supports the work of parent groups, including the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), the Minority Student Achievement Advisory Council (MSAAC), and the Loudoun Education Alliance of Parents (LEAP). The work of these groups is vital to the success of LCPS, and for this reason, a *Handbook* has been developed to enhance the effectiveness of the partnership between these groups and LCPS staff. The focus of the *Handbook* is practical, with an emphasis on structure, planning, logistics, and communication.

**Structure**

The parent groups are free to design their own structure, but each should have the following minimum components:

1. An executive governing group
2. An LCPS staff liaison
3. A set of bylaws
4. A mission statement

Furthermore, the groups should be open to membership of any Loudoun County resident. It is recommended that the groups develop formal meeting agendas and post them on their websites and that they keep formal minutes of their executive meetings and their business meetings. They will publicly post the minutes from their general business meetings.

MSAAC shall seek to have a delegate representative from each school to allow for voting at general business meetings.

**Communication**

The importance of clear communication between the parent groups and LCPS staff cannot be over-emphasized. We ask that parent groups adhere to the guidelines contained below in order to facilitate efficient and effective meetings, activities, and initiatives.

**LCPS Staff Liaison**

Each year, LCPS leadership assigns a primary (and sometimes a secondary) staff liaison to each parent group. The liaison’s role is to guide and support the group and to be the primary communicator with the leadership of the group.

The parent groups’ leadership should work through their assigned staff liaison at all times. Any communication with staff other than the liaison without the assistance of, or at a minimum the knowledge of, the liaison is likely to lead to confusion, which in turn can cause disruptions to the group’s programming.

If the primary staff liaison is away from the office and unavailable to the group’s leadership, the secondary liaison or a surrogate for the primary liaison will be the primary communicator.

Staff liaisons are provided for each group by the following departments and office:

SEAC – Department of Pupil Services

MSAAC – Department of Instruction

LEAP – Office of the Chief of Staff

In the event that a parent group’s leadership has a concern about the work of their assigned liaison, LCPS asks that the concern be addressed by the chair or president of the group directly to the Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Services, the Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, or the Chief of Staff.

**Points of Contact**

Points of Contact (POCs) are different from and separate from the staff liaisons. POCs are assigned as needed based on the immediate and temporary needs of the parent group and the expertise of the POCs. Generally, POCs are assigned to develop items on the parent groups’ general business meeting agendas. For instance, if a parent group were to hold a meeting to inform its members of academic programming for special populations, it is likely that POCs would be assigned by both the Department of Pupil Services and the Department of Instruction to cover the agenda items related to special education and English language learners, respectively.

While LCPS acknowledges that for enhanced efficiency the leadership of the parent groups may communicate directly with POCs, LCPS asks that the parent groups leadership ensure that the staff liaisons are always fully knowledgeable of the communication by CCing them, including them in face-to-face interactions, or by including them on conference calls.

Staff are very busy with their normal work routine and the work of the parent groups is of vital importance. It is therefore imperative that communication is efficient and effective so that staff time is used wisely and the work of the parent groups is impactful.

**Planning**

**Advanced Planning**

The executive members of the parent groups will meet with their LCPS staff liaisons in the spring semester preceding the academic year being planned for to determine the dates and topics of general business meetings. The groups shall do their best to maintain the dates and topics set in these meetings. This is vital due to the fact that LCPS staff plan for and around these meetings, and switching dates and/or topics can disrupt the effectiveness of a meeting because staff may no longer be able to plan for or attend a meeting whose date and/or topic has been changed mid-year.

**Agendas**

The groups are highly encouraged to prepare a formal agenda for their regular business meetings and to post these on their website and make them available to members and the general public by any other means. Topics or items listed should be written in plain terms that clearly identify the topic and potential staff involved. Agendas should be submitted to the LCPS Public Information Office (PIO) at least 3 days in advance of the meeting. The PIO will place the meetings on the Division calendar on the LCPS official website, but will not post the agenda unless specifically asked to by the leadership of the parent group. In such cases, the group’s leadership should provide the agenda to the PIO in the format to be posted.

**Guest Speakers**

LCPS acknowledges the value in the parent groups maintaining a high level of independence regarding programming and that this would extend to their ability to choose, vet and invite guest speakers to their meetings and events. LCPS encourages close communication and collaboration between the parent groups and LCPS staff liaisons regarding the selection and vetting of guest speakers. The desired outcome is that speakers promote the mission of the Division while also challenging stakeholders to consider new ideas and innovative approaches to education in Loudoun County.

**Attendance by Members of the School Board and/or Board of Supervisors**

Often the parent groups wish to invite members of the School Board and/or the Board of Supervisors to speak at meetings. At times, one or two members are invited to speak on specific topics related to their work. Other times, invitations are extended to the entire board(s) to participate in a town hall style meeting. When such invitations are anticipated, it is important that the parent group(s) notify the Public Information Office of LCPS (and Loudoun County Government Public Information Office if the Board of Supervisors is involved) and ask that the meeting be posted in accordance with Virginia Freedom of Information Act (VFOIA) meeting notification requirements.

**LCPS Staff Liaison and Point of Contact (POC)**

While planning for any meeting, the parent groups’ leadership should work through their assigned staff liaison and the designated POC(s) established for the meeting in question. It will be important for the presenters that the topic is fully discussed and planned for at least 3 weeks prior so proper planning can occur regarding the specific topic and the expectations of the parent group. At times, the LCPS staff liaison may work independent of any POC(s). Most of the time, the LCPS staff liaison will work with a POC(s). For instance, if a meeting topic involves both a set of instructional practices and data surrounding those practices, it is likely that the LCPS staff liaison will work with two POCs including one who manages data and one who manages practices. In such a scenario, the leadership of the parent group would communicate either through the LCPS staff liaison or directly with the designated POCs while ensuring that the LCPS staff liaison is aware of the communication. It is imperative that all communications be channeled through the LCPS staff liaison or directly to the POC(s) with the LCPS staff liaison fully aware of the communication.

**Logistics**

**The Role of LCPS Staff**

LCPS staff are ready to assist the parent groups with setting up meeting spaces with the proper electronic equipment, and with providing signage, name tents, refreshments and other items to make meetings comfortable, inviting and effective. We ask that the leadership of the parent groups work only through their staff liaison to make these arrangements. We also ask that the parent groups exercise great care in scheduling general meetings around major LCPS events such as School Board meetings, graduations, and other large gatherings. LCPS staff liaisons will guide the parent groups in scheduling their general meetings.

**An Important Caveat**

In the event that the School Board Chair calls a special meeting of the Board and requires space that has already been reserved by a parent group, LCPS staff will move the parent group to a different venue to allow the School Board to use the space. This is true for any group that has reserved space that the School Board needs for a special meeting.

Additionally, staff that are scheduled to speak at parent group meetings may have to be called away due to the School Board requiring them to attend a special meeting. In such cases, the staff being called away will do their best to provide a qualified substitute staff member to attend the parent group meeting.

**Items Available for Parent Group Meetings**

Handheld and lapel microphones

LCD projectors

Projection screens

Pointer/clickers

Audio sound system

Portable podiums

Set podium

Sign easels

Flip pads w/easels

Boxes of pens, pencils, highlighters, etc.

Name tents for leadership and/or panels

Folding tables

**NOTES:**